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The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus

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love. The former is an instantaneous deliverance from the guilt and power of sin, and the latter is a deliverance from the "being" of sin.

I will leave it to the reader to settle this issue with Maddox and Collins. Both treatments are masterful and exhaustive. I sense that Collins has, to some extent, the better of the argument when it comes to his emphasis on the importance of the instantaneous moments in Wesley, as opposed to "some amorphous process, marked by barely distinguishable increments of grace" (188).

On the debit side, I must confess some disappointment in Collins's treatment of Wesley on justification and imputation (88, 90). There is a sense that he has not grappled sufficiently with the seemingly contradictory way that Wesley treats imputation. Such a criticism leads to one final theological observation. Collins has, thus far in his career, devoted enormous energy and time to analyzing and describing Wesley's theology. He most certainly cares deeply about Wesley's theology, and it is clear that Wesley is the most formative part of Christian tradition for Collins's own theology. In view of this passionate pursuit of Wesleyan soteriology, I would challenge Collins to do something akin to what Theodore Runyon (in the more centrist Methodist tradition—see his *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* [Abingdon: 1998]) and John B. Cobb (in the liberal and process wing of the same tradition—see his *Grace and Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* [Abingdon: 1995]) have done: produce a work on soteriology in which he confronts the truth question with Wesley. In other words, I challenge Collins to bring Wesley (in good Protestant fashion) to the severe test of the anvil of Scripture and answer not only the question of "what" Wesley actually taught, but the "so what" questions: (1) Is Wesley's thought true to Scripture? and (2) How does Wesley speak to contemporary soteriological issues, especially to the issues of personal salvation? For instance, can Wesley's views on justification (how imputation relates to sanctification), and especially his views on instantaneous sanctification and Christian assurance, really stand up to the truth question in the light of the scriptural witness? Furthermore, does instantaneous sanctification have any precedents in the Christian tradition?

The Scripture Way of Salvation will certainly take its place alongside Oden's and Maddox's works (and possibly Theodore Runyon's *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*) as one of the standard surveys of Wesley's soteriology for the coming decade (if not generation). It should be required reading for all courses on Wesleyan theology and recommended reading for anyone seeking an introduction to Wesley's soteriology.

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WOODROW W. WHIDDEN

Crossan, John Dominic. *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998. 544 pp. Hardcover, \$30.00.

Crossan begins his book by clearly outlining its scope: Christianity in Palestine in the 30s and 40s of the first century. He explicitly limits his investigation to the time period before Paul's epistles.

Much of the book, and quite rightly so, deals with the issue of methodology.

He uses the results of anthropology, history, archaeology, and literary criticism as the basis on which he builds his picture of earliest Christianity.

From anthropology Crossan uses the distinction that empires based on agrarian economies were of two types: the traditional and commercial. In traditional agrarian empires, the peasants, while exploited, are allowed to continue to work their land. In commercial empires, rationalization of land use often means that peasants become dispossessed and swell the ranks of the artisan class and the expendable class. It is this process that can trigger peasant revolts, especially when either the priestly or retainer class provides leadership and ideology. This observation leads directly to the historical and archaeological backgrounds. During the first two hundred years of Roman domination there were three major revolts, compared to one in the four hundred previous years of foreign domination. Archaeology confirms that in Galilee, the establishment of Sepphoris and Tiberias, one rebuilt and the other built within twenty miles and twenty years of each other (219), hastened the commercialization of the land resources in Galilee during the early first century. For Crossan, this provides a secure background against which to view the earliest history of Christianity: "Jesus' kingdom-of-God movement began as a movement of peasant resistance but broke out from localism and regionalism under scribal leadership" (235).

The rest of the book traces the evidence of two separate communities: one in Galilee and one in Jerusalem. The Galilean community is revealed primarily in the sayings traditions and that at Jerusalem in the passion traditions.

The sayings traditions found most useful by Crossan are those common to Q and the Gospel of Thomas. The earliest strata of these reveal that Jesus affirmed an ethical eschatology. "Jesus' primary focus was on peasants dispossessed by Roman commercialization and Herodian urbanization in the late 20s in Lower Galilee" (325).

For Crossan, "the most important unit for understanding the historical Jesus, the Common Sayings Tradition, and the continuity from one to another" (325) is reflected in GThom 14 // Luke 10:4-11; Matt 10:7, 10b, 12-14; Mark 6:7-13, which all deal in one way or another, with the rules for itinerant preachers. The nature of oral transmission means that only a group such as described in the sayings would have cause to preserve it. This group is to be distinguished from itinerant Cynics by the observation that whereas the Cynic would take everything that he needs with him, it is precisely the necessities of life that Jesus told his followers to leave behind, thus forcing them to become dependent on householders. This was not a one-sided relationship, though, as the itinerant preacher would give the gospel to those of the house in return for hospitality. "The itinerants look at the householders, which is what they were yesterday or the day before, with envy and even hatred. The householders look at the itinerants, which is what they may be tomorrow or the day after, with fear and contempt. The kingdom program forces these two groups into conjunction with one another and starts to rebuild the peasant community ripped apart by commercialization and urbanization" (331).

As Crossan understands it, the Jerusalem community responded "to the crises created by Agrippa as King, Matthias as high priest" by the "creation of the *Cross Gospel*" (510). They saw in their present crisis a repeat of the earlier crises. All the subsequent passion narratives are derived from this one original *Cross Gospel*, which can

be reconstructed from a careful analysis of the Gospel of Peter when compared with the four canonical Gospels. Its construction owes more to fulfillment of biblical prophecy (i.e., exegesis) than to historical memory. An interesting process occurred in which exegesis (from the men in the Jerusalem community) and lament (from the women in the Jerusalem community) combined to produce story.

In many ways this book is an impressive achievement. Crossan's desire to initiate a debate about methodology is only to be commended, and in many ways his methodology extends the boundaries of what has been deemed possible in the past. He has successfully incorporated the insights of anthropology, history and archaeology in a way that has hitherto been attempted all too few times. This synthesis has produced some very insightful and useful results, and while others will wish to debate the appropriateness of some of the details, it seems more than likely that in future this type of synthesis will become more commonplace in works investigating the history of early Christianity. Furthermore, the wide range of literature that Crossan has been able to call upon shows an impressive grasp of several very complex fields.

While the book is technically competent, Crossan's great strength lies in his ability to communicate. The combination of beautiful English, clarity of logic, quality epigraphs, and plentiful illustrations makes what would otherwise be a very long and complex book a compelling read.

Finally, Crossan's work exhibits a freedom and a courage to explore new territory. It attempts a coherent synthesis of early Christian history in a manner that has not often been seen since the work of Rudolf Bultmann. He feels free to debate with or even ignore much "received wisdom."

Despite the book's obvious merits, there are a number of features that perhaps limit the possibility of its widespread acceptance. Many of these lie in the area of the results of literary criticism which are used as the basis for the major section of the work. I doubt that I will be the only one who remains unconvinced that a subsection of the *Q Gospel*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Cross Gospel* reconstructed from the Gospel of Peter, are the most reliable sources for this period. *Q* and the *Cross Gospel* are reconstructions. Even ignoring the urgent, but probably minority, viewpoint put forward by those advocating some form of the Griesbach hypothesis who dispense with *Q* altogether, to use the reconstructions of *Q*, especially treating as reliable the subdivision of *Q* into *Q1*, *Q2*, and *Q3*, appears to be building on a flimsy foundation. I am persuaded myself that the Gospel of Thomas is largely independent of the canonical Gospels, but because of the late date and obvious tendential changes in its traditions, find myself perplexed as to how much reliability I can place on it. Crossan does little to argue his case for an early dating of the traditions from it which he uses.

Crossan's insistence that the passion narrative is built on the basis of scriptural exegesis rather than historical memory appears unlikely on two counts: First, he himself concedes that some of the women mentioned in the traditions were actually present at the crucifixion. One wonders why they would not have related the events they observed in a manner which made some impact on the community's common tradition. Second, modern readers find several of the OT citations surrounding features of the crucifixion narrative non-intuitive. Even

conceding the pattern of first-century exegesis, how likely is it that just starting with only the fact of crucifixion, the present passion narrative would have emerged out of reading the OT alone?

There are a number of less important matters that could be raised in evaluating the book. Perhaps the most significant of these is the need for a concise summary chapter at the end which brings together all of Crossan's conclusions about the history he has been investigating. It is a long book (586 pp. in its main body), and on the first reading one is left wondering whether Crossan has actually accomplished what he set out to do. The reader is left contemplating the character of the Christian God in the final chapter: a worthy topic, but one that appears to be yet another element that is marginally attached to the central concern of the book. It is only when one goes back to survey the book as a whole that one discerns the massive achievement of Crossan. A summary chapter would make this much more accessible to the reader.

These matters, and host of smaller details will ensure that the work will generate much further debate. But this is probably more a positive than negative thing. Crossan and those working with similar methodologies have brought new possibilities to the study of Jesus and his first followers. The book's undoubted merits, its controversial conclusions, the significance of the subject it treats, and the reputation of its author, all conspire to make this book one which is likely to become a standard work of reference.

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Dembski, William A. *Mere Creation: Science, Faith and Intelligent Design*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998. 475 pp. Paperback, \$19.99.

William Dembski, a leader in the design theory movement, defines "mere creation" as "a theory of creation aimed specifically at defeating naturalism and its consequences" (14). The book *Mere Creation: Science, Faith and Intelligent Design*, edited by Dembski, contains eighteen papers presented at a 1996 conference held on the campus of Biola University and sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ through its Christian Leadership Ministries division. In addition to the papers, Henry F. Schaefer III, the third most cited chemist in the world, contributed a foreword; Dembski wrote the introduction; the prominent University of California, Berkeley antievolutionist and author Philip Johnson contributed an afterword; and Bruce Chapman, former United States Ambassador to the United Nations Organizations in Vienna and president of the Discovery Institute, provided a postscript. Most other contributors are well-known participants in the origins debate.

Because of the broad definition given to "mere creation," this conference was open to those of all faiths who question the naturalistic origin of life. In fact, many of those presenting papers published in this book are not evangelical Protestants; examples include: Michael Behe, Catholic; Mark Reynolds, Eastern Orthodox; and David Berlinski, Jewish. While the collected papers in *Mere Creation* are written from many different philosophical, theological, and professional perspectives, all question the ability of the neo-Darwinian mutation/selection model to explain what is observed in nature.